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On Renouncing the World to Practice Good at the Sight of the Adultery of Crows¹

Dhyāna Master Shingon 信嚴 was Chinu no agatanushi Yamato-maro 血沼縣主倭麻呂,² governor of Izumi district, Izumi province 和泉國泉郡,³ in the reign of Emperor Shōmu. By the gate of his house there stood a big tree in which two crows built a nest, hatched eggs, and sheltered their chicks under their wings. The male crow flew here and there to bring food for his mate who sheltered the chicks. Once when he left the nest for food, another crow flew into the nest and began to flirt. Attracted by the newcomer, the female crow flew high up into the sky toward the north, abandoning her chicks in the nest. When the male crow came back with food in his mouth and could not find his wife, he watched over the chicks affectionately and did not look for food for many days.

The governor noticed this and had someone climb the tree in order to see the nest. The crow and the chicks were dead. Realizing the female crow's adultery, the governor was overcome with pity and his mind was filled with mercy. He renounced the world, leaving his home, family, and rank, and followed the Most Venerable Gyōgi 行基⁴ to practice good and seek the path. He was named Shingon.

His wife was also of the Chinu no agatanushi. After her husband left her, she remained faithful to him without bitterness. When her dear son contracted a fatal disease and was dying, he said to her, "It will prolong my life if I drink my mother's milk." The mother gave her breast to her son as he had asked. Sucking the breast, he lamented, saying, "I am abandoning the sweet milk of my mother and dying!" and breathed his last. Sorrowing for her deceased son, she renounced

the world as her husband had done and devoted herself to learning and practicing good dharma.⁵

Dhyāna Master Shingon, however, had little luck and, after short association with the Most Venerable Gyōgi, preceded Gyōgi to the grave. Wailing, the master composed the following poem:

Did you not promise me we would die together?

But, alas! You are gone,

Leaving me behind.

Are you a crow, to be such a great liar?

When man makes a fire, he must gather firewood of pine. When it rains, the slate has been moistened beforehand.⁶ The governor renounced the world after seeing the crow's wicked deed. It is the Buddha's work to lead man to enlightenment by showing him the reality of suffering, which is the reality of living beings in the world of desire.⁷ Those who do not like this reality renounce such a world, while those who are foolish indulge in it. The note says how praiseworthy it was for Mr. Chinu no agatanushi, who saw the wickedness of a crow, to avoid worldly filth and the transience of fleeting flow-ers; to purify himself, devote himself to practicing good, and pray for wisdom; and to look forward to birth in the pure land, liberated from this world. He excelled particularly in his wish for liberation from this world.

5. For the significance of this episode, see Chap. II(2)b.

6. In some localities in Japan there is a proverb: When the surface of the rock gets moist with dew, it will rain without fail. This may well refer to the rain-making ceremony in which water is poured on the sacred stone to induce a rainfall.

7. 欲界 *yakukai* (Skt. *kāmadhātū*); the sphere of desire, one of the three spheres of the world, which includes the six lowest heavens and five other ways of existence, that is, man, *asura*, animal, hungry fiend, and hell.

1. Cf. *Shitchū-shō* (VIII).

2. The Chinu family was of the local gentry, native to Japan, according to the *Shinsen shōji-roku*.

3. Present Sennan- and Senboku-gun, Ōsaka-fu 大阪府泉南, 泉北郡.

4. See Chap. I(1)d, II(2)c, etc.